

Manly Pursuits

The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins

A HISTORICAL ANTHOLOGY OF CRITICAL TEXTS



INTRODUCTION

In December 2001 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art acquired *Wrestlers*, Thomas Eakins's last sporting painting. Within a few weeks I began researching it, an aspect of my job that I thoroughly relished, as I had grown up in Philadelphia, Eakins's birthplace and artistic center. I had grown fond of American art as a teenager during many excursions through the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the largest public repository of Eakins's work. I was not surprised by the wealth of writings on him; after all, he is now considered one of this country's iconic artists. But I was baffled by the near total absence of references to our new canvas. Going back through the literature, I did learn that Eakins's other sporting images were extensively commented on during his lifetime and afterward, in the daily press as well as in journals. It seemed to me that the Eakins literature, both contemporary commentary and posthumous criticism, served not only as an excellent introduction to Eakins's life and work, but also to the transformations of American art and culture from the late nineteenth century to the first years of the twenty-first century.

The anthology of critical texts previewed here will be a supplement to the exhibition *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*. Since superb publications on two aspects of Eakins's sporting oeuvre—rowing and swimming—already exist, I felt that an anthology of this sort would have much greater scholarly value and was long overdue. Its contents are arranged chronologically. After a letter from Eakins to his father in 1868, the selections run from 1871, the date of the first reviews of Eakins's sporting paintings, to 2005, when Henry Adams's controversial monograph *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of An American Artist* was published. In most cases, when a text was later reprinted, the earliest version was selected. This enables the reader to learn exactly when certain interpretations and ideological approaches first entered the dialogue. The wealth of literature made the task of selection difficult. Excellent writings by major Eakins scholars as well as penetrating analyses by nonspecialists had to be left out. I take full responsibility for the selection and for any bias or omission that may appear.

Ilene Susan Fort
The Gail and John Liebes Curator of American Art
Los Angeles County Museum Art

ILLUSTRATIONS

COVER / BACK COVER

Wrestlers, 1899

Oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2007.1

PAGE 7

Sailboats on the New Jersey Shore, c. 1881

Albumen silver print

Philadelphia Museum of Art,

Gift of Seymour Adelman, 1968-203-4

PAGES 8-9

A May Morning in the Park

(*The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand*), 1879-80

Oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art,

Gift of William Alexander Dick, 1930-105-1

PAGE 12

Swimming

(*The Swimming Hole*), 1884-85

Oil on canvas

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, purchased by the Friends of Art, Fort Worth Art Association, 1925; acquired by the Amon Carter Museum, 1990, from the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth through grants and donations from the Amon G. Carter Foundation, the Sid. W. Richardson Foundation, the Anne Burnett and Charles Tandy Foundation, Capital Cities/ABC Foundation, Fort Worth Star Telegram, The R. D. and Joan Dale Hubbard Foundation and the people of Fort Worth, 1991.19.1

PAGE 18

Salutat, 1898

Oil on canvas

Addison Gallery of American Art,

Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts,

Gift of anonymous donor, 1930.18

PAGE 22-23

The Champion Single Sculls

(*Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*), 1871

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase,

The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift, 1934 (34.92)

March 6, 1868, Paris

Thomas Eakins to his father Benjamin Eakins

Paris, Friday, March 6, 1868

Dear Father,

The big artist does not sit down monkey like & copy a coal scuttle or an ugly old woman like some Dutch painters have done nor a dungpile, but he keeps a sharp eye on Nature & steals her tools. He learns what she does with light the big tool & then color then form and appropriates them to his own use. Then he's got a canoe of his own smaller than Nature's but big enough for every purpose except to paint the midday sun which is not beautiful at all. It is plenty strong enough though to make midday sunlight or the setting sun if you know how to handle it. With this canoe he can sail parallel to Nature's sailing. He will soon be sailing only where he wants to selecting nice little coves & shady shores or storms to his own liking, but if ever he thinks he can sail another fashion from Nature or make a better shaped boat he'll capsize or stick in the mud & nobody will buy his pictures or sail with him in his old tub. If a big painter wants to draw a coal scuttle he can do it better than the man that has been doing nothing but coal

scuttles all his life. That's sailing up Pig's run among mud & slops and back houses. The big painter sees ~~Nature~~ the marks that Nature's big boat made in the mud & he understands them & profits by them. The lummix that ~~don't~~ never wondered why they were there rows his tub about instead of sailing it & where he chances to see one of Natures marks why he'll slap his tub into the mud to make his mark too but he'll miss most of them not knowing where to look for them. But if more light comes on to the concern that is the tide comes up the marks are all hidden & the big artist knows that nature would have sailed her boat a different way entirely & he sails his as ~~well~~ near as he can to how nature would have sailed hers according to his experience & memory & sense. The stick in the mud shows some invention he has for still hunting these old marks a plomb line to scrape the shore and he flatters himself with his ability to tell a boat mark from a muskrat hole in the deepest water, and then he thinks he knows nature a great deal better than any one else. I have seen big log books kept ~~with~~ of the distances made in different tacks by great artists without saying a word about tide or wind or anything else the length of a certain bone in the leg of a certain statue compared to the bone of the nose of a certain other one & a connection with some mystic number the whole which would more mystify the artists that made them than anyone else. Then the professors as they are called read Greek poetry for inspiration & talk classic & give out classic subjects & make a fellow draw antique not see how beautiful those simple hearted big men sailed but to observe their mud marks which are easier to see & measure than to understand.

I love sunlight & children & beautiful women & men their heads & hands & most everything I see & some day I expect to paint them as I see them and even paint some that I remember or imagine make up from old memories of love & light & warmth &c &c. but if I went to Greece to live there twenty years I could not paint a Greek subject for ~~I would~~ my head would be full of classics the nasty besmeared wooden hard gloomy tragic figures of this the great French school of the last few centuries & Ingres & the Greek letters I learned at the High School with old Haverstick & my mud marks of the antique statues . . .



MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER

“The Philadelphia Exhibition—II”

from *The American Architect and Building News*

December 25, 1880



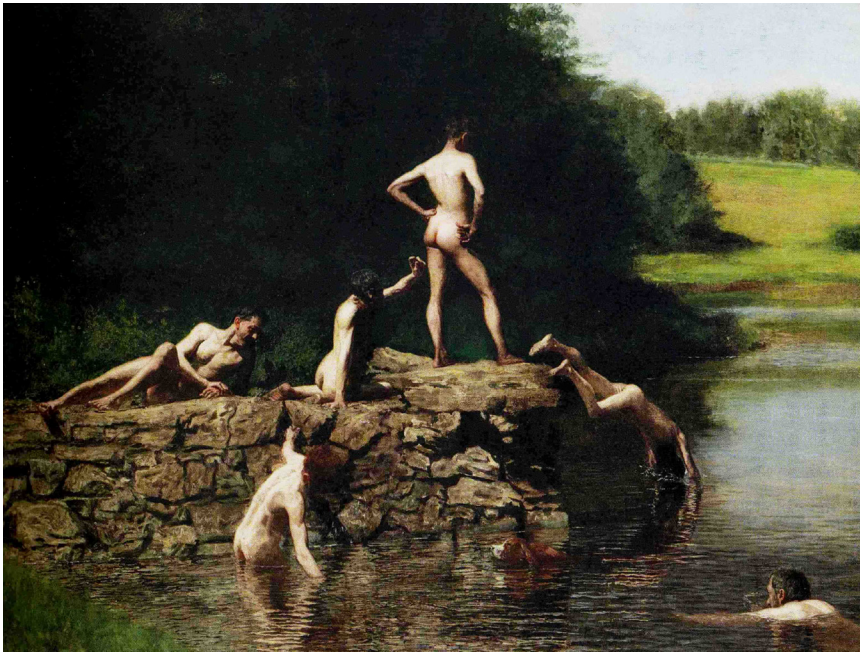
Amongst home works the first place belongs, I think, to the strong and intensely characteristic work of Mr. Eakins. There is, perhaps, no artist in the country who can rival him for originality of conception, artistic use, no one who imprints a sign-manual of individuality so strongly on everything he touches. One of his pictures in this exhibition is called "Turning the Stake, —a Pair-Oared Race." It is very strong in drawing, and the moment is cleverly chosen when the stroke backs water and his action is in contrast with that of his mate. The color of the picture is rather curiously dark. "It wants light" one hears it said, but I do not feel that there is in it any actual want of light such as we have seen in Mr. Weeks's picture, for example. To my mind at least, the canvas is simply pitched in a low and somewhat unusual key, which is yet perfectly justifiable and which justifies itself, indeed, for we comprehend at once that a sunlight effect is intended. Another singular point, perhaps, is the way in which very strong blues give the color-note to the canvas. They are found in the large flag and the headdresses, and are continued in the water. They are neither the pale and faded nor the very dark blues to which artists usually resort for safety when they needs must undertake the color. They are deep and brilliant, and most uncompromising. They have been criticized by many in my hearing, but merely, it seemed to me, in deference to the conventional theory about blues in general. If we imagine the picture with its blues changed to the more usual reds, for instance, we find that it loses [sic] at once much of its singular force and charm. Mr. Eakin's other picture excites even more of comment than this one. It is a rather small canvas, called "A May Morning in the Park," and represents a four-in-hand with a portrait-group of figures on top of the coach. The figures are admirable for life and accuracy, and yet for the way in which they are made to take their unobtrusive part in the

general scheme. Here we have red instead of blue; not the conventional shades, however, but the rather aggressive scarlet which the coach builder seems to love, and which is here continued by the vivid parasol above. The painting, as such, is admirable, the misty morning effect is well given, and one only regrets that the green foliage which forms a solid background is not a little more subdued in tint. The disputed point in this picture is the curious way in which the horses are given. It is an established fact, I have been told, that a trotting horse has but one foot on the ground at a time. Instantaneous photographs are said to demonstrate this, and Mr. Eakins has painted his steeds in accordance with such evidence as theirs rather than with that of the unsophisticated eye. The result may be false. No amount of knowledge on the subject will ever teach our eyes to see a horse with three feet poised in the air. We shall forever see him with at least two feet for support, as we shall forever say "the sun rises" and "the moon sets." It is strange for the every line he draws, to hear the most callow critics pause in front of his canvas and say, "All out of drawing! Dreadful!" Yet after finding that every visitor without exception bears witness to the strangeness of the effect portrayed, and after reflecting that art is not for the scientifically-instructed mind, but for the eye, which sees optically, so to speak, and not scientifically, no matter how accurate and how sensitive it may be, one must confess to wishing that Mr. Eakins had denied himself the pleasure of a fascinating little experiment, and had painted his horses in the time-worn way.

WALTER PACH

“Painting: A Grand Provincial”

from *The Freeman*, April 11, 1923



One has only to look through a collection of old photographs in some Western State-house and note the lines of firmness and thought in the rugged faces of the pioneers and builders, to see the type of American of which the supreme example is Lincoln—who differed from the other men of his period in the degree of his idealism and power rather than in the cast of his mind. If one ask [sic] oneself whether any writer has evidenced in his work the character to which these men bore witness through their lives, one is made to pause. Whitman, Emerson and Mark Twain have each some of the qualities belonging to that period; and doubtless Whitman would to-day be regarded as its greatest representative. But although the expression of a people of Anglo-Saxon stock might naturally be supposed to come through literature, I believe that it is a painter who, by the quality of his art, with its excellences and its limitations, has given us the truest record of the America of his time. It is through this quality that one may best approach the pictures now at the Brummer gallery, and so realize the significance of the work of Thomas Eakins.

In person, the painter was of the type which he represented. His head was massive, his eyes clear and determined; his bronzed skin was that of a man who had faced rough weather, and his strong jaw was only half hidden under the sparse, iron-grey beard. I once observed Mr. Eakins in conversation with his friend William M. Chase, and the contrast between the two was striking. The personal verve and distinction of the brilliant technician were arresting, even as his paintings were conspicuous in the exhibitions of his time. But the memory of the scene that comes back most vividly to me is that of the heavy figure of the older artist (older by only a few years, yet seeming of another

generation), in whose slow, impassive gestures there was something of the depth and dignity of his art.

We have been long in realizing the importance of his work. It lacks the surface-charm of Whistler; it knows nothing of the soft sentiment that Americans like so much in George Inness, though perhaps the day for that is passing. Winslow Homer is of this sterner stuff, and perhaps it is through our growing appreciation of Homer that we are coming to understand the even more searching scrutiny of appearances that occupied the long life of Thomas Eakins. Eakins was a realist, but one must see him as more than that. His observation of men and things; his dissecting of cadavers, human and animal; his study of the natural sciences; his willingness to avail himself of photographs for his work; his patient, impersonal search after character; his severe and salutary work as a teacher; these are the facts about Eakins that until now have most impressed us. But they are not enough to explain the irrepressible rise in esteem that has lifted his work from the neglect that even the great exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum seemed for a time unable to overcome.

Were the qualities touched on above the only ones to be mentioned; were Thomas Eakins merely the sharp-eyed, strong-brained recorder of the physical or even the intellectual characteristics of the people and things he saw, . . . we should not find him filling the high place which he holds to-day. There is a force in this painter that comes from his embodying—not copying—the character of his country and generation; and such a force finds expression in relations of form and space and light that are not to be accounted for as realism. They are universal and absolute, like the truths of mathematics; they are the abstractions that we know best in music and architecture, but which must underlie the representation of the painter or sculptor if it is to live.

A picture which shows this quality with special clearness is “The Swimming Hole.” Disregarding the questions of colour, of the minutiae of naturalism, and of the sense of out-door light—all of which may or may not be in a great picture, and yet have for too long kept us from perceiving what this artist has to offer us—disregarding these questions, there is, above all, the nobility of scale, the emphasis on the lines and masses that build up the work into a thing of large and harmonious proportions. This quality is basic, and it is evidence of Eakins’s intuitive understanding of the character of that America of the builders which finds so strong an expression in his art. Just as in a Roman portrait we see the character of the men who could conceive the great empire of that time, who could conceive the arch that traverses space with the invincible sweep of Rome itself, so every picture by Thomas Eakins is instinct with the forces that were sweeping the America of his day.

The admiration of the world of his time for the great thinkers and engineers is again and again celebrated by Thomas Eakins in his work, whether in pictures like “The Gross Clinic” and “The Agnew Clinic,” where actual episodes of the life of the scientists and teachers are shown in dramatic fashion, or in portraits of the man whom the artist preferred to characterize as “The Thinker.” Always there is the sense of the constructor about this painting; and the strength of Eakins’s art lies in the fullness with which his line follows the urge to mastery — physical or intellectual — of the men who incarnated the essential effort of his period. The youth who stands on the rock at the centre of “The Swimming Hole” is rendered with the energy of a Florentine; and in pose and buoyancy it contains more than a hint of the great “St. Christopher” of Pollaiuolo at the Metropolitan Museum. When one has perceived the quality, at once classical and yet con-

temporary, of the nude as represented by Thomas Eakins, one is better prepared to appreciate the splendid and dynamic balance attained in the portrait of Professor Leslie Miller. The realism of these pictures is their obvious feature, and has led some people to confuse the painter with those men who lose themselves in the maze of detail; but Eakins has the power to hold great masses in their essential and expressive directions even while painting wrinkles and hair, small reflections and exact textures.

The masculine character of his art concentrates on form as its medium. In the severity of his outlook, he is unconcerned with beauty of colour; while atmosphere and its unifying function, its drawing together of isolated objects into harmonious ensemble, had no interest for this mind that was for ever trying to penetrate to the thing and its meaning, independent of the enveloping air and the glamour of colour. . . .

Critics have at times tried to establish a likeness between Eakins and some of the great French artists of the nineteenth century; but I think the attempt is more misleading than helpful. Eakins has nothing of the classicism of Ingres, the link between Raphael and Renoir. Neither has his realism the quality of Courbet's; for the work of this rough mountaineer of the Jura who seemed in his time to trample underfoot the gracious wisdom of French art, appears today only as the expression of an aspect of the genius of his country which had lain dormant. The architecture of Courbet's canvases, their colour — almost as restrained as that of Eakins, but still of the French school — and his instinctive use of design even while labouring at the problems of sight, all mark him as of that country whose ancient culture is never, apparently, to be carried beyond its borders by visitors from other lands. . . .

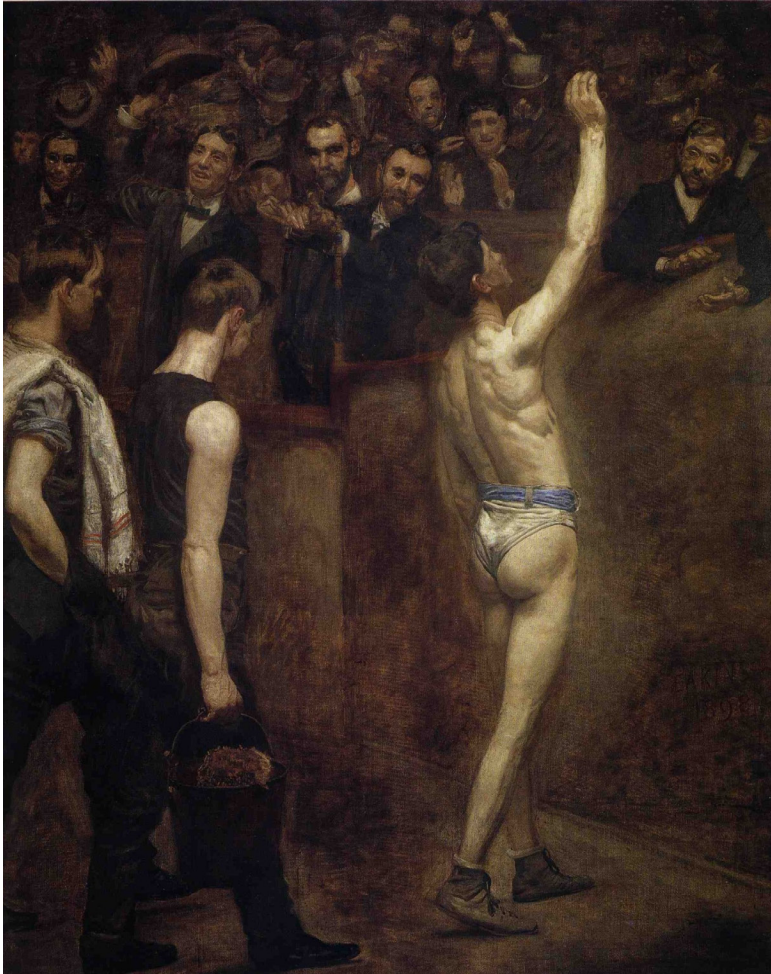
It was to the school-teachers of French art that Thomas Eakins addressed himself, and then only for his technical training. Yet even though he continued their method without radical change, one feels that he is incomparably farther removed from the lifeless academism of the followers of Gérôme and Bonnat than he is from the other line of French artists who preserve the country's record of vital production. In reality, it is with neither group that we should identify him. The virtues of his works, as I have tried to show, are those of the life typified in his art, and the defects of the unsuccessful pictures are American defects. At times not even the powerful will of the man could lift him above the poverty and bleakness that are part of the American scene; and his painting is touched by the chill of it. At other times he seems to speculate on certain qualities of the old masters; and in reaching out for things that belonged to the opulence of the Venetians and the mystery of Rembrandt, his pictures show a certain confusion of purpose. Or perhaps, on the other hand, the intensity with which he fixes his eyes on form and character makes him forget that he is dividing his canvas into ungainly and ill-connected parts; a fault from which the instinct of an older culture would have saved him.

But the time has come when the sense of his limitations is dissipating, in our minds, through our grasp of his immense qualities. One jealously defends the autochthonic character of his art because one feels that we must have a solid native basis such as Thomas Eakins offers us, upon which we may build when we have mastered the European traditions we are slowly assimilating. With the passing of time, when Eakins seems as far away as Copley, our first great primitive, the figure of the old Philadelphian painter and teacher will take an ever higher place among American artists: his work, with its almost naive self-reliance and its deep, homely truth, will take on a profounder beauty even than that which we see in it to-day.

FAIRFIELD PORTER

Thomas Eakins

from *Thomas Eakins*, New York: George Braziller, 1959



"Eakins is not a painter, he is a force," was the appraisal of Walt Whitman . . .

A great deal is packed into Whitman's appraisal.

It implies that a moral quality, a force of character, was more important than Eakins' artistic stature. It implies that a certain moral force is expressed in his paintings, and perhaps that Whitman understood the paradoxical nature of the content of his paintings. Briefly it is this: Eakins used art to express an American sense of life that was essentially anti-artistic. In his life time, he was not a popular painter. His contemporaries were repelled by the severity of his acceptance of the values of his environment. This acceptance was symbolized by the fact that he lived all his life, except for his student days, at the same address.

The society whose values Eakins expressed was a new one engaged in rebuilding the country after the disaster of the American Civil War. From contemporary photographs one notices even in the faces of Northerners a sense of defeat, a recognition of the necessity for self-reliance to replace the youthfulness that the war had destroyed. There was a break with tradition: the war had separated us from our past. Although the condition of the country after the war was already implicit in the many rapid changes that had gone on before it, changes based on the Westward expansion, on the struggle for dominance between North and South, and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, still, before the war the artistic expression of the country dated back to Colonial times, behind which stood the Italian Renaissance. . . .

The French academicians painted “machines,” that is, deliberate, elaborate paintings of great size whose purpose was the display of the artist’s powers. Eakins thought of painting as a deliberate construction. His paintings of scullers were executed from studies of perspective, of reflections and of anatomy put together in the studio. An Eakins “machine” was more modest and thorough than a French academician’s; it was a fixation of an idea on canvas . . .

Eakins’ career was a *tour-de-force*: he tried to make an art for a society that did not believe in anything beyond material facts. He tried to make something that would give this materialism meaning. . . .

Eakins made an effort to conform his taste to what actually was. In so far as he succeeded, he isolated himself... His inner life was like an Indian wrestle in which the force of his domineering character was opposed by the power of a destructive conscience. Often the struggle between these forces led to immobility. Gérôme remarked about a watercolor of a sculler Eakins sent him from Philadelphia, that since he had chosen the central point of the stroke, the result was immobility. It led to darkness. The light in his paintings is hardly pervasive; even in *Max Schmidt in a Single Scull* the dark accents win out. It led to a conscientiousness about detail on one side and an insistence that everything with its load of detail be properly related to the ground, that figures have bones, that weight be supported. It led to his insistence on the primacy of thinking and was expressed in a talent for mathematics (which “you can’t fool”). It required him to consider that beauty must be paid for in order to be justified. It is paid for by courage and by difficulties; it is justified by scrupulousness in conformity to nature; things must be finished . . .

What he could have done with a more selfish character and a weaker conscience is manifest in the sketches... Or it shows in a pleasure in light in *Maybelle*, or in the relaxed, confident brushing of *Salutat*. He composed several figures best when he could identify himself with the painting, as in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reeds Birds* . . .

Eakins did not want to transcend his environment, in fact he could not even imagine transcending it. If it rejected him, his difficulty was that he could not reject it, but had to try to prove, if only to his friends and himself, that he really fitted in harmoniously. He was rejected in his life time because society could not forgive him for accepting it as it was, instead of offering it a picture of something better. Eakins was outside of his time because his intuition was hindsight: what society had missed seeing, was what Eakins saw when it was already beginning to be too late—as a dying man is said to see his whole life clearly pass in review.

ELIZABETH JOHNS

from **“Max Schmitt in a Single
Scull,”** or **“The Champion
Single Sculls”**

in *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983



Glad to be home after such a long apprenticeship, Eakins began his career with scenes of activities that he had missed in Paris—the outdoor pursuits of rowing, hunting and sailing with his father and close friends, and the indoor pleasures of listening to his sisters play the piano. These were activities that in one form or another people had enjoyed for centuries, but in the mid-nineteenth century they were distinctively identified with “modern” life.

He started with rowing. Although he had written his sister Frances from Paris that for fun, sailing was “much better than rowing,” obviously rowing made a better painting subject. He tried one compositional idea with the subject and then another, working from detailed drawings and experimenting with a variety of painting techniques. By 1874, when he finally turned to scenes of hunting and sailing, Eakins had pursued the theme through nineteen careful drawings, water colors, and paintings. The intensity of the chase is evident in every one of them.

The most successful of the rowing paintings, also Eakins’ first, is *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, or, as he called it, *The Champion Single Sculls*. Painted with a capability that is remarkable so soon after his discouragement in Seville, it shows much of the varied technique that he would use throughout his career. As he was to do later as well, he filled the work with reportorial detail that was rich in metaphor. And although the subject was anchored in his own experience, it also reveals the extent to which he shared with his fellow citizens their excitement about the pursuits of modern life.

The Champion Single Sculls is a portrait of Eakins’ friend Max Schmitt sculling on Philadelphia’s Schuylkill River. Eakins and other oarsmen row in the middle and far distances. The tall, slender Schmitt, in the near shell, pauses to turn and look at the

viewer over his right shoulder, his face, arm, and shirt lit brilliantly by the late afternoon sun. He relaxes his right arm, with his left he guides the oars, as his shell “Josie” — its name written clearly on its side—straightens out from a turn and glides toward the viewer’s left. In the middle distance is Eakins, with intent face and a stocky physique. He moves away from the viewer, not relaxing but rowing with concentration, and the sun strikes him and his boat across the front. His shell has come from the left, in a gentle curve that parallels that of his friend’s craft. These oarsmen have met and passed each other, each on his own mission.

Also absorbed in their own purposes are three other single scullers, in the distance—one on the far right, set off by a red shirt, one behind Eakins, in white, and a third by the bridge pier near the left. Various landmarks identify the location as on the Schuylkill: the Railroad Connection Bridge (with a train puffing across it from the right) and the Girard Avenue Bridge, peculiarly situated at an angle to each other; Sweetbriar, a colonial mansion on the brow of the hill just off the river’s right bank; and, in a distinctive red boat near the left shore, a crew of two rowers and coxswain in Quaker dress. The spare brown of the trees on the shoreline identifies the season as autumn. Smaller details complete the scene.

The painting surface reveals precisions as well as imprecisions; these differences seem to be deliberate. Only two preparatory drawings for the painting survive; they are Eakins’ very careful rendering of a pier of the Girard Avenue Bridge and on the back of that his sketch of the blade of an oar, with the inscription “left or looking out to the blade. For his later rowing paintings he was to prepare elaborate perspective drawings to establish the spatial bearings of the shells, and there is no reason to think that he did not do so for this first painting as well. The

two small drawings that do exist point the same lesson as the later perspective studies: that with objects—which have a specific shape and place in space—Eakins wanted to be precise; that with activities he wanted to show—as his note to himself on the oar blade reveals—how an instrument with which one carries out an activity is maneuvered by the user . . .

On the canvas itself, Eakins seems to have moved from what he could render to what he could only approximate—from measurable objects to the unpredictable moving water, sky, and clouds. He drew the bridges and Schmitt's shell precisely to outlines that are still visible on the canvas, and then painted them, along with the tree branches and trunks in the left middle ground, with thin opaque tones that cleanly connect one outlined edge to its opposite. These are the only exact areas on the canvas, the only areas in which Eakins seems even to have tried to point matter-of-factly to objective reality.

Elsewhere across the canvas he caught a world whose primary reality he felt from within. He drew his technique from the masters of indirect painting whose work he had observed carefully—Gérôme, Couture, Velázquez, Rembrandt, even mid-century American landscapists. He took, and made his own, the repertory of layering, transparent glazes, opaque scumbling, and brushwork that had been explored from the time of Titian. With attention to the human form that reflected his early-expressed fascination with the body in movement, Eakins modeled the figures of Schmitt and himself with built-up layers of glazes and opaque high tones, painstakingly knitting together bodies that are specific in height, weight, and muscular action. Then he built up the environment in a number of steps. He prepared his canvas for the area of the water with a brownish-gray underpainting and pulled over it a light blue (visible just near the right edge of the tree reflections above Schmitt's scull, and near other edges across

the canvas), and then, unevenly, more solemn blues, toned with gray or brown, and occasional light browns. Finally, he washed over the surface thin glazes of browns and grays that in some places reflect details along the shore, as on the left and near the bridge; in others hint a changing sky, as in the foreground; and at spots seem to suggest a quickening, short breeze. With dark, regularly spaced marks he broke this varied surface to reveal the steady dip of oars and the measured movement along the river of Schmitt's and his own shells.

. . . Signing his authorship of the painting across his own boat in the picture, Eakins asserted his craftsmanship as artist to have been as grounded in experience—and as demanding—as that of the builder of the delicate shells.

Schmitt is the hero in this personal, fall painting, but sculling, the Schuylkill, and Philadelphia expressed Eakins' proper place, too.

For rowing was an activity that Eakins knew well. He had learned to row long before he went to Paris, first going out on the river in the early 1860s at a time when other Philadelphians as well were trying out this new sport. All the members of Eakins' family rowed—his father, sisters, and his mother; indeed, in their Mount Vernon Street home the family was only a few blocks from the allure of the Schuylkill for recreation in the late afternoons. From Paris Eakins mentioned rowing in several of his letters to his family—in comments that reveal the several dimensions of their enjoyment of the sport: asking his mother if she had been on the river recently to see the fall colors; suggesting to his sister Frances that she go row on the river when she found herself depressed about her progress in her piano studies; and urging that Frances and Margaret should learn to swim well since they rowed so much.

Many of Eakins' friends at Central High School had also taken up rowing, and Max Schmitt, the central figure in *The Champion Single Sculls*, was prominent among them. Classmate Joseph Boggs Beale, later an artist/illustrator, wrote in his diary of being on the river several times a week; Eakins' chemistry professor at the high school and subject of a later portrait, B. Howard Rand, M.D., was even the president of a boating club. Some Philadelphians rowed independently, while others, like Dr. Rand and Max Schmitt, rowed as members of recently formed boating clubs. Joining their new enthusiasm for rowing with an equally new passion for organized activity, several of these clubs in 1858 had founded the Schuylkill Navy to sponsor semiannual regattas and championship races, and the activities brought new publicity to rowing. Whether for club activities or private relaxation, for racing or for exercise, Philadelphians took to the Schuylkill with craft of all descriptions, and from April until October the river was dotted with citizens in earnest training or just as earnest relaxation.

They were not alone in their enthusiasm. Throughout America, in fact, the years framing the Civil War saw a virtual flowering of rowing and, indeed, of many other sports. With the rise of economic prosperity a substantial number of city dwellers—new professionals, clerks, and skilled workers—enjoyed increased income and, for the first time, notable leisure. Because so many of them were engaged in exclusively mental and indoor occupations, they turned to the outdoors for relaxation. Following the nation's lingering affection for English customs, they chose their new sporting pursuits from English models that they knew through English sporting periodicals. Sports newly popular in England ranged from hunting, billiards, cricket, croquet, walking, horse racing, and yachting to rowing, and of these, rowing had

particular attraction for Americans. Favorable rivers and lakes were abundant across the continent, and some of the values associated with rowing in England appealed to the developing American advocacy of leisure that was instructive, elevating, and democratic.

With the passion of the convert, rowing's new devotees in America studied its many aspects. They wrote about its history, its technology, its social implications, its moral dimensions, and, most prominently, its character in America that distinguished it from its English antecedents.

These antecedents had assumed an influential pattern. For centuries, rowing in England had been associated with watermen on the Thames, who engaged in the "trade of rowing" by ferrying passengers in heavy boats from one side to the other. In the course of such ferrying, watermen had become competitive about their individual speed and skill, and a tradition developed of gentry passengers occasionally wagering on the outcome of a ride... late in the eighteenth century... impressed not only with its value as entertainment but also with its benefits to health, students at Oxford began to row informally, and by 1806 students at Eton were rowing also. Rowing became institutionalized. Oxford established an official college rowing club in 1815 and Cambridge in 1827; in 1829 these clubs, rowing in eight-man barges, met in the first of the famous annual Oxford and Cambridge boat races that even today are prominent events. In the 1820s and 1830s gentleman amateurs formed the first rowing clubs, and cities began to sponsor annual regattas... Over only a few decades rowing was transformed into the sport of a gentleman...

PROJECTED TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: IN HIS OWN WORDS

Thomas Eakins, 1868
Letter to his father, Benjamin Eakins,
March 6, 1868, Paris

SECTION 2: CONTEMPORARY COMMENTARY (1871-1916)

Anonymous, 1871
“Art: Third Reception of the Union League,”
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Anonymous, 1871
**“The Fine Arts: The Third Art Reception at the
Union League III,”**
Philadelphia Evening Bulletin

Earl Shinn, 1875
“Fine Arts: The Water-Color Society’s Exhibition—II,”
The Nation

Paul Leroi, 1875
“Salon de 1875-XV,”
L’Art

Anonymous, 1879
**“Budding Academicians. American Genre Pictures..., ‘The Oarsmen’
of Thomas Eakins,”** *New York Times*

Author unknown, 1880
**“Art at the Academy. Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia
Society of Artists. Sixth Notice,”**
The Philadelphia Press

Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer, 1880
“The Philadelphia Exhibition—II,”
The American Architect and Building News

William Clark, 1881
“The Fine Arts. The Spring Exhibition at the Academy—Second Notice,”
The Daily Evening Telegraph

Sylvester Koehler, 1881
**“The Exhibitions. III—Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia
Society of Artists,”**
American Art Review

Anonymous, 1885
**“At the Private View. First Impressions of the Autumn Exhibition
at the Academy of the Fine Arts,”**
The Philadelphia Times

Leslie W. Miller, 1885
“Art. The Awards of Prizes at the Academy,”
The American

Anonymous, 1886
“Art Notes,”
The American

Charles De Kay, 1887
“Movements in American Painting. The Clark Collection in New York,”
Magazine of Art

Mitschka, 1899
“Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition as Seen and Heard, “
The Art Collector

SECTION 3: CONSTRUCTING THE MYTH, 1917-1940

Henry McBride, 1917
“News and Comments in the World of Art: Thomas Eakins, I,”
The Sun

Walter Pach, 1923
“Painting: A Grand Provincial,”
The Freeman

Alan Burroughs, 1923
“Thomas Eakins, The Man,”
The Arts

Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., 1929
“Thomas Eakins,”
International Studio

Lloyd Goodrich, 1930
“Thomas Eakins,”
in *Sixth Loan Exhibition: Winslow Homer, Albert P. Ryder, Thomas Eakins.*
New York: Museum of Modern Art

John Rothenstein, 1930
"A Note on Thomas Eakins,"
Artwork

Marsden Hartley, 1930
"Eakins, Homer, Ryder,"
unpublished ms, Hartley Papers, Beinecke Library,
Yale University

Lewis Mumford, 1931
"The Brown Decades: Art,"
Scribner's Magazine

Bryson Burroughs, 1934
"An Early Painting by Thomas Eakins,"
Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

SECTION 4: CANONIZING THE MASTER, 1941-1982

F. O. Matthiessen, 1941
American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman.
London: Oxford University Press

Charles Bregler, 1943
"Photos by Eakins: How the Famous Painter Anticipated the Modern Movie Camera,"
Magazine of Art

James Johnson Sweeney, 1944
"Art Chronicle: The Bottles Were O'Donovan's,"
Partisan Review

Adam Emory Albright, 1947
"Memories of Thomas Eakins,"
Harper's Bazaar

Fairfield Porter, 1959
Thomas Eakins.
New York: George Braziller

Lawrence E. Scanlon, 1960
"Eakins as Functionalist,"
College Art Journal

Sidney Kaplan, 1964
"Introduction,"
in *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting*. Exh. cat.,
Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Gordon Hendrick, 1965
"A May Morning in the Park,"
Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin

Sylvan Schendler, 1967
Eakins.
Boston: Little, Brown

Barbara Novak, 1969
"Thomas Eakins, Science and Sight,"
in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*.
New York: Praeger

Gerald M. Ackerman, 1969
"Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gerome and Bonnat,"
Gazette des Beaux-Arts

Donelson F. Hoopes 1971
Eakins Watercolors.
New York: Watson-Guption

Henry B. Rule, 1974
"Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins: Variations on Some Common Themes,"
Texas Quarterly

John Wilmerding, 1975
"Peale, Quidor, and Eakins: Self-Portraiture as Genre Painting,"
in *Art Studies for an Editor: 25 Essays in Memory of Milton S. Fox*.
New York: Abrams

Theodor Seigl, 1976
"Catalogue entries 336a & b and 337,"
in *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art, Bicentennial Exhibition*.
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Carl S. Smith, 1979
"The Boxing Paintings of Thomas Eakins,"
Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies

SECTION 5: DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTH, 1983-2005

Elizabeth Johns, 1983
"Max Schmitt in a Single Skull," or **"The Champion Single Skulls,"**
in *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press

Michael Fried 1987.

“Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration on Thomas Eakins’s The Gross Clinic,”

Representations

Philip Fisher, 1986

“Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture,”

in *Reconstructing American Literary History*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Rob Wilson, 1987

“Sculling to the Over-soul: Louis Simpson, American Transcendentalism and Thomas Eakins’s Max Schmitt in a Single Scull,”

American Quarterly

Allen Ellenzweig, 1992

“Sutcliffe in England, Eakins in America,”

in *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe*.

New York: Columbia University Press

Michael Hatt, 1993

“The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins’ The Swimming Hole as a Homoerotic Image,”

Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts

Martin A. Berger, 1994

“Negotiating Victorian Manhood: Thomas Eakins and the Rowing Works,”

Masculinities

Whitney Davis, 1994

“Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins’s Narratives of Male Nudity,”

Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians

Anne McCauley, 1994

“ ‘The Most Beautiful of Nature’s Works’: Thomas Eakins’s Photographic Nudes in their French and American Contexts,”

in Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*.

Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press

Marjorie Alison Walter, 1995

“Fine Art and the Sweet Science: On Thomas Eakins, His Boxing Paintings, and Turn-of-The-Century Philadelphia,”

Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley

Arthur Danto, 1995

“Men Bathing, 1883: Eakins and Seurat: Both Subverted What They Believed Was the Task of Art,”

Art News

Christina Currie, 1996

“Thomas Eakins Under The Microscope: A Technical Study of the Rowing Paintings,”

in *Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures*. Exh. cat.

New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery

Amy B. Werbel, 1996

“Perspective in Eakins’ Rowing Pictures,”

in *Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures*. Exh. cat.

New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery

Richard R. Brettell, 1996

“Thomas Eakins and the Male Nude in French Vanguard Painting, 1850-1890,”

in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture*, Eds. Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash. Exh. cat. Fort Worth,

Texas: Amon Carter Museum

Kathleen Foster, 1997

“Drawing: Thinking Made Visible,”

in *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler’s Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*.

Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Alan C. Braddock, 1998

“Eakins, Race, and Ethnographic Ambivalence,”

Winterthur Portfolio

Michael Leja, 2001

“Eakins and Icons,”

Art Bulletin

Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, 2001

“Photographs and the Making of Paintings,”

in Darrel Sewell et al, *Thomas Eakins*. Exh cat.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Henry Adams, 2005

Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist.

Oxford University Press, 2005

Manly Pursuits will be published by LACMA this fall in an electronic edition and a limited edition print format. It has been compiled and edited by Ilene Susan Fort, the Gail and John Liebes Curator of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

